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Bard

THE BEZEL

The dark that hides inside the dawn
is precious, precarious. Take it,
that lump of amber just this side of opaque
worn smooth by my thumb
and wear it in the hollow of your throat.
Method of remembering me.

Help me. I was born
in an opera, grew up in a book,
had puberty in Greek,
turned fat and sad in symphonies
until one day I was a cathedral
more Byzantine than Romanesque
with a weird bell tower made of glass
and goats are living where there should be bells.

So reading a poem is like walking
through an unknown house,
stormy night, power failure,
every now and then a lightning flash
shows clear a picture on the wall
of the one whose house this is,

so love songs end in self-portraiture
which is only rational, you know who you are
so the song should explain the I in I love you.

And that's what happened to the pretty
song about amber and your throat and dawn.

30 July 2002

WORDS

Corporal. A cloth
to hide your body in.

Mildew. A honey
made by time
coloring the edge
of things.

Lichen. The corpse
of color
sprawled on bedrock.

Weather. I
am all you ever have
to call your own.

30 July 2002

COSMOGAMY

Why is *tin*
assigned to Jupiter?
Because in alloy
it makes copper hard.

The gods are elements,
do not exist in a pure state
unmingled. A wedding
comes before anything

at all can be. Just so
I can go nowhere at all
without you. You live
in and as my mind.

Which is why we're also gods.

30 July 2002

THE OLD

responsibility comes back.

To have to say
more than I know

to run trembling
after the last thing I said
to see where it goes

to see what it knows
over there
where the road
bends away from the river

but I go down anyhow
airless under trees
to a bleak shore and absent house
startled birds escaping

and something knows.

30 July 2002

PORTRAIT BUST OF A LATE EMPEROR

A kind of genius, a telephone
plugged into the rock. He hears
but gods knows what he hears,
who is talking on the other end.

If camels wrote books they would write his,
or if ships could spread their arms.
There are so many women on his mind.

30 July 2002

L'égalité de leurs plaines n'est que de temps en temps délicieusement interrompue par des petits bois composés d'arbres, qu'on appelle sacrés pour une raison que je vous dirai demain.

Casanova, *Icosameron*, Day II

I need to tell you this, I don't know why,
I think the woods are holy because foxes
live there, are beautiful and kill modestly,
only what they eat. Because the foxes
come to visit you at night, bringing
obscure messages from me. And you answer,
tying delicate ribbonwork of words
into their red fur. Then they come to me.
They love what they are doing,
they love what they were born to do

which is one reason we like them so.
But that may not be his reason for the wood,
he may be thinking of wolves and panthers,
or slim half-naked nymphs and naiads
no longer quite young, left from some old
Greek dream of what the trees are for,
bowers and enlacements of the flesh.

And that is lovely for us too. But we
who have our own tomorrows
will build our own reason there,
and that is all a building ever is,
the structure outward of how much we understand.

30 July 2002

CROSS NO

(like Orpheus bent over his knees
listening to the lightning in his bones,
the blue will of the wisps
that run through the blond
hairs of his thighs,
listening half in love
with his posture alone

*I love a world
that makes me
do this to me)*

Cross no
word out.
So what key
shook me
from the dictionary?
Know this junction
caress this salve
we try on all contexts
to soothe the dark ones'
square dungeons,
what kind of hell
have we chosen
or have they sucked down
wirklich, shussed
like a bad child, *kakos*
pais, squaring to murder
a squirrel,

Clara,

let me bring you
milk after milk,
another and other,
whatever you ask me
this will be done,
this will be John,
that's the calendar,
town clock
run down
will crash, key
I woo from
kingly Nagas,
open, open!
Chaff me all you like
(or all your life)
my spirit's loom
says everything true, sharing
shampoo with a bald man,
that's my own memory
broken into your lap,
take your shoes off,
this star loves folk,
don't argue with the pupil,
watch out, the eyes' satchel
chooses what to carry
cut from rock,
just we can opt for
challenge, call
cock all you want,
it will crow will
come more of a hurry
than you, than you.

In Chicago I miss you
we worked and waited
all the energy silted
homeward, forsaken oil,
remembrance's headlock
where the jocks
tried to take you dark
after. But you recede
in over-tuning, sound
je ne comprends
what we discover
by the measure
ladly, this is that glad star
gaggle, whose wings
over moors go scuffing
daylight's pale shoe.
Summon us,
gate's key,
shrub dark in the bleak,
eschew Thai teak that
elephant slaves
portaged home,
rouse to groan
your own dismays,
or is it a brilliant lust
for constellation?
Check the latest information,
cut the umbrageous,
not sad, clear the bona fide
laughter, turn diurnal
an alphabet of talking
delicate book shadows

a guru to make you,
so we shall marry
cobalt and nickel,
for streetly we brought them,
your sheltering back, shy
at so much emptiness,
contacts we throw
despair and cotton shirt and where
is she, let the weather
swallow my invocation,
a marble sky looks at us.

30 July 2002

(for Dorota, hearing *Krosno*,
through Anglo-Deaf ears)

SPIRAL CITY

If it let me I would break the river here
just before it slips through our harbor into the sea
and let it pool out to lap a pleasant city
built on a new plan — a house
for everyone, we are born alone, will die
alone, we should live so, in tiny houses
with seagulls stately on the roof beam,
and all we have to do in our snug quarters
is write down clearly the memoirs of our exile and captivity.

Each house will have a sleep room and a work room
a kitchen garden with squash and corn and coriander
a kitchen to cook in and a bathroom tucked away
and a little room upstairs where you can sit all day if you like
in reverie or studying the tracks of stars or do those weird
gymnastics of the soul called hobbies, like whittling the faces
of dead queens out of bass wood, or making mosaics from bottle caps,
you know, the way we do.

And every house a cellar hath
— we must know the on and the over and the under,
the three tastes of time, the three vestments of living on earth.
Some will make the cellar their secret place for secret things
and some the attic, there are always some choices left,
some will use the garden, or even carry it around inside

when they go visiting. For going is licit, and visits are virtues,
in the quiet hours of the day, or at night to sleep with someone
else's earthly presence, touch and such,
then wake in a new geometry of limbs —

that sort of thing is good for the soul,

the cell

that lives in us as we in our dear houses

cochlea-spiralling out around the river and the lake, Helicopolis,

up the blue hills and down the rusty slopes on the dry side

for those who love not rain. But I do,

so choose the dampest chilliest parish for my own,

harbor mouth and fog. Live alone! Know everybody!

Be a lighthouse! Be at home! Those are our few laws

but infinite the Talmud on them grows.

Walk with me around my foggy spiral town and watch the birds

dispute the acres of the air — we have to note

which birds settle on which houses, for they are messengers to us

bringing the rules of the game, new every day,

by which our memoirs are given form and kept coming, fresh,

mysterious, vivid as another person's smell,

and a bird is a noisy little piece of weather that means you.

Their cry wakes you. You hear them

as you hear everything, as a word.

A lyric, an explanation, an equation,

a lucid compromise. You write it down

and go from there. One word is rule enough for a day.

Meantime all over town we're all doing it more or less in synch,

each one with her different bird heard word,

and the sun outside, pale mistress of my morning fog,

keeps us moving more or less together

to find where all those words go. Someday we will know,

someday the Queen will come

riding on her white barge over the star-struck sea

with gannets over, with geese barking, her dolphins flirting,

in she'll come and in her arms will be the scroll
where someone lovelier even than she has far away
read all our memoirs and put them all together
so she can chant out loud to us this gospel of the absolute,
ourselves alone have written it with all our lives
but no man knows how to read it till she comes,
and tells us in our own words the documents of time,
the why and who and how of our long exile,
children as we guess we are of some vanished star.

Speaking of children: a child as soon as he can walk and talk
some kind of sense, is given a house of his own.

You're on your own, the mother cries, proud and sorrowful,
though she and its sisters spend a lot of time each day
visiting it and telling how to live.

Listen but don't hear, we tell the children

as soon as they come to school,

Memorize but don't remember, *Use words without speaking*,

Sing inside your body, *Kiss a mirror but don't marry*,

mottoes like this are worked in stucco on the classroom walls

where we teach them random languages, random facts,

random histories of whatever country comes to mind —

whatever the individual teacher knows or thinks he knows

and cares about. Any good teacher

needs to care about something very much — not the children,

not his own life, but something else, else will save him, else

is what he can give from the heart of him to the heart of them,

doesn't matter what, stamp collecting, rock climbing, Persian poetry,

let him teach that with ardor and exuberant detail and confusion

and leave it to the children to work it out, see how it fits

into the hugeness of the world, let them ardently guess

and whatever they finally fall in love with will be right,

right, and relevant. Because they are the only ones who understand.
Don't you remember? When we were children we too
knew everything, and the happiest of us still keep some
of that preposterously noble certainty. We heard what the old
were saying, but we listened with our bones and not our brains
so their sad bibles never stifled us. We understood,
we chose our words thoughtfully or rashly
each day for the game from all they spouted or whispered tenderly,
this lopsided sailboat with the pretty russet keel
or that Grammar of Old Prussian, whatever we found
we picked up and used and sang with and then forgot. But I digress.

31 July 2002

desiring all of the other's presence

and then I wonder
the unbearable totality
I yearn for, the whole
identity, wouldn't it kill me
if I took it and held it
all at once, thigh and mind
and speaking lips,
dark chapel of her
intuition, her logic
and her science,
her shadow and the leaves
around her house,
the lies she even tells herself,
all,

 this strange word *all*
pierces me with longing.

And then I know
there's more I yearn for,
all her absences,
trajectories of her departures,
round dance of her
hidden hours,
I want her silences.

Everything and all
if I could know
entirely it would seem

a forgiveness of me
at last, a knowing
like the last light
over the mountain,
everything finished,
everything held
in the twilight
where distance ends.

31 July 2002

DESIRE

A wise man traced desire to its source:
it maps the mind that feels it.

The face of the one you love
is the map of your mind at last.

31 July 2002

Learning to know the moon
he learns the man.

Learning to touch the woman
sun burns his hand.

We are all that is left of the world.

31 July 2002

[Maybe this is finally that famous song Adorno says only a Barbarian will 'sing after Auschwitz.']

After the cool dawn hours
now the sun rises hot over the linden tree,

flowers that stand guard above us
all our lives, linden and maple and ash and yew,
guard me and my house. Linked we live

and say so little to each other, a word
here a shadow falling there.

31 July 2002

*jo home de bona voluntat
i de poca fe
espero un monument
al desertor desconegut
de tots els exèrcits
de totes les guerres*

— Tadeusz Rozewicz, from “The Deserter.” in Catalan translation

*I'm a man of good will
and little faith,
I want a monument to me,
the Unknown Deserter
from all the armies
of all the wars*

more than that
I want to be able
to want something new
something no soldier
ever wanted something no
civilian ever got,

a horn blowing
in the street
an angel
in dirty underwear
shouting at me
“get out while you can,

amigo”

for I would be the friend
of your every mind
every mood
I love I hold
in my heart
while I run,
I have to,
the voice tells me
Be the far friend
of every friending

the voice banishes me
into the lovely woods
where cowards
come into their own.
kings of shadows

and always
hearing keenly
since all I am
is listening

I whisper your name to the water brooks
I mumble your name against maple bark
until my lips bleed

who could love you
longer and truer?

31 July 2002

ELS DESERTORS

I

jo home
de poca fe
reso per la pau
d'aquestes ànimes mortals
per les ombres
que no poden
trobar lloc
de descans etern
errants entre el cel buit
i la terra pàtria

jo home de bona voluntat
i de poca fe
espero un monument
al desertor desconegut
de tots els exèrcits
de totes les guerres

un monument dreçat
d'amagat al cel
sota terra
un monument dreçat amb
els ulls
de les mares mullers
germanes amants
un monument dreçat
de vergonya desesperació
por
amor odi
un monument sense nom ni
cognom

La valentia del desertor
és difícil de suportar
per al proïsme
qui ha fugit del camp de la
glòria
qui ha fugit de l'escorxador
no trobarà perdó
entre els coetanis
ni entre els descendents

qui s'ha apartat de matar
s'ha matat a si mateix
i s'ha soterrat viu
en l'oblit

coronat amb fulles de roure
penjat en la flor de l'edat
de la branca d'un arbre
o d'un fanal
el desertor
déserteur
Fahnenflüchtiger
Landesverräter
fuig fins a la fi del món

pobre d'aquell
que en la flor de l'edat
sense haver satisfet els seu deler
vital
ha caigut víctima
d'un punyal desamic
pobre d'ell i pobres de nosaltres
els seus compatriotes
o conciutadans
la seva ànima no coneixerà el
descans
es manté entre nosaltres
ultratjada i ferida

II

el poeta resa per l'ànima
del desertor desconegut

Posem-nos a resar
els creients en Déu
i els creients en No-res
per les ànimes mortals
que erren
pels camps boscos vergers
pels carrers de les ciutats
per esglésies i cementiris
Resem tots pels desertors
de la Primera i de la Segona
Guerra Mundial

vulgues donar-los Senyor
descans etern
resem tots pels desertors
de les guerres defensives i
ofensives
de les guerres justes i
injustes
resem tots pels qui
renunciaren
a les insígnies als uniformes
a les armes i als estendards
«No mataràs»
digué el Senyor
i calla
«Gott mit uns»
digué l'home
i marxà a la guerra
empunyant
la creu

Jo Us convoco
a l'Homenatge als Caiguts...
Desertors!
De tots els exèrcits del món!

que una companyia d'honor
llenci una salva apuntant
als vostres cors caps
ulls tapats

que els vostres col·legues
afusellin una volta més
els vostres noms
la vostra ombra
el record que ens queda de
vosaltres

l'apoteosi dels cabdills
dels generals dels carnisers
dels genocides dura

ells decideixen la guerra
i la pau
el dret a la vida
el dret a la mort
i les mares infanten encara

infanten herois
infanten desertors
infanten persones

pobres éssers humans
els únics mamífers vestits
amb uniformes d'opereta
sota bigarrats estendards
es preparen per a la guerra
per a la guerra per a la
guerra

es preparen per a l'última
aparició
en el teatre de la guerra

i jo espero
un monument
al desertor desconegut
de tots els exèrcits del món

Traducció de Josep-Antoni Ysern
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